

Gender Equality, How To Modernize The Belarusian Economy – Belarus Civil Society Digest

The Eastern Europe Studies Centre together with Stefan Batory Foundation invites the public to a discussion on gender equality in Belarus. The project Civic Dialogue hosted a panel discussion on how to modernise the Belarusian economy.

The Central Electoral Commission of Belarus agreed to implement some of the changes proposed by the Helsinki Human Rights Committee. Now the central governing bodies of political parties and other public associations will have the right to send observers to precincts during voting.

Civil society campaigns

[Art Siadziba launches a campaign to buy its own premises.](#)

Deprived of rent for the fifth time, Art Siadziba has launched the Building Art Siadziba Together! campaign to raise money for its own premises. The organisers plan to collect \$200,000 to purchase their own premises in Minsk's downtown and create an independent cultural and social space open to all Belarusians. The campaign has its own website dom.artsiadziba.by – an interactive house where anyone can buy bricks, each of which costs \$5.

Discussion of a universal gender webportal. [Eastern Europe Studies Centre](#) (EESC), together with the Stefan Batory Foundation invite the public to the event *GenderBY.com: Creation of an Internet Portal on Women's Rights in Belarus*. The discussion is to raise points on the key aspects of creating a universal and interactive Internet portal

about gender equality in Belarus (tentative name –www.genderby.com) and establish a working group for its development. The meeting will be held on 14-15 March at the EESC office in Vilnius. The contact e-mail: aivaras.zukauskas (at) eesc.lt.

The 2nd Social Forum set to take place in Minsk. On 10-11 April the Minsk International Education Centre (IBB) will host the 2nd Republican Social Forum. Organised by IBB and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Forum is to propose recommendations for the development of social services on the basis of multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue. The Forum's thematic areas will include such topics as NGOs on the market of social services, public support for and trust in NGOs, socially responsible economics and partnerships in the social sphere, etc. All types of organisations, except political parties, are invited to participate.

Courses and training

Leadership for women. The forums SYD and IRI have begun accepting applications for participation in leadership courses for young Belarusian activists entitled *Expanding representation and opportunities for women in political parties and NGOs*. The course aims to teach a group of young Belarusian females about gender issues, women's leadership and international experience in this field. The training will be held in Lithuania; all of the invited lecturers are gender experts from Belarus, Lithuania and Sweden. The application deadline is 10 March.

Non-formal education for all generations portal. On 17 February a new Internet portal *Non-formal education for all generations* was presented in Minsk. Initiated by the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, the web platform serves as a hub for communication for providers of non-formal educational services and consumers of these services and aims

to provide timely and complete information to citizens of all ages about possibilities for self-development and improvement in various areas of an individuals' personal and professional competencies.

[Civic Dialogue: Paths to modernise the economy of Belarus](#). On 25 February in Minsk, Civic Dialogue hosted an expert roundtable on *Strategies for the Modernization of the Belarusian Economy*. [No government officials attended](#) the event, though they had previously declared their willingness to participate. At the same time, the organisers believe that the conclusions derived from the roundtable could be used when drafting the state strategy of development of Belarus until 2030.

[Training course on cross-sectoral dialogue](#). CSO representatives are invited to participate in the educational course *Developing the capacity of CSOs in conducting cross-sectoral dialogue*. The course is organised by the ACT educational NGO and the Assembly of Democratic NGOs and aims to develop the competencies required to conduct effective dialogue with other sectors (government, business, international agencies, etc.) in the interests of specific target groups that are being served. The training course consists of six 3-day training sessions; the first training will be held on 24-26 March.

Eco-events

[Energy Club presented Austrian experience in Minsk](#). The Energy Club launched a series of events dedicated to the EU's energy efficiency and renewable energy sources policy (RES). [The first gathering](#) for the new series took place on February 26 in Minsk. The invited speaker, Prof. Herbert Lechner, Deputy Executive Director of the Austrian Energy Agency guided the audience through the EU's Climate and Energy Policy, while suggesting practical examples of how Austria deals with its own energy security challenges. The event is organised under

the auspices of the ODB EU-Belarus Task-Force programme.

Eco-campaign Social Network. Live launched. The new campaign aims to convey important environmental information to citizens who do not use the Internet, as well as raise the level of social activity and the level of personal responsibility of Belarusians in general. Graduates of the School of the Environmental Activism together with the Green Alliance prepared five leaflets, which describe in detail where one can deliver clothes, dispose of paper products or dangerous waste. Everyone can take part in distributing leaflets, printing them out and posting them in public places.

Interaction between the state and society

The right to public dissent is taken away. In Belarus, the public discussion of urban development projects will be conducted in only two formats – either through strictly informing participants and conducting an analysis of public opinion or through the work of a commission. Public meetings with the massive participation of citizens will no longer take place. These "innovations" have been included into a resolution of the Council of Ministers, which is entering into force on 1 April 2014.

Viasna fails to protect website in court. On 18 February the Central District Court of Minsk heard a complaint filed by the Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights Centre *Viasna*, Valiancin Stefanovich, to challenge a decision by the Prosecutor General's Office to blacklist the spring96.org website as a resource with restricted access. The court ruled that Valiancin Stefanovich was legally an improper plaintiff, because he is not the owner of the website spring96.org, and the blacklisting of the website did not violate his personal rights.

Another prosecutor's warning to independent journalists. On 19 February Jury Dziashuk was summoned to the Prosecutor's Office

of the Lida district, where the journalist received an official warning, referring to a ban on working for foreign media without accreditation, as well as the inadmissibility of the publication of unverified information.

BHC complaint satisfied – CEC reverses the admission of observers. On 19 February the Central Election Commission satisfied an appeal by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and amended the Regulation on Election Observers: now central governing bodies of political parties and other public associations will have the right to send observers to precincts during elections. According to human rights defenders, it is a positive step as the procedure is more liberal.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.